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The Workshop

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THE HANDLE IN ANTIQUE VESSELS.

The Art of Pottery may certainly be considered to surpass, in point of abstract beauty, all the other branches of Ornamental Art of the great Græco-Roman period. Structural embodiments of a greatly refined, artistic taste, these works of art, which combine truth and fitness with the most perfect beauty and delicacy of form, enhanced by an exquisite ornamentation of surface and outline, are real gems, standing far above most of our manufactured productions of recent date in this branch of ornamental art.

Devoid of any timidity of treatment, every line of these charming works of art is marked by that freedom and congeniality of invention, characterising the creations of a truly artistic genius, which, neither impaired nor checked by individual encroachments, is justly appreciated and supported by a highly cultivated people imbued with an intrinsic love, and sound understanding of the beautiful in Art.

In studying the structure of antique vessels, we find great care and skill bestowed on the treatment of the handle which is either simple and »handy«, with but a scanty use of decorative features, when applied to the more common vessels for daily use; or truly rich with its charming ornamentation, showing a profusion of graceful motives, when it has to embellish the sacrificial vessels, urns, and vases. In these we see sometimes entwined snakes, sometimes twisted ropes and branches arranged as handles, or little figures serving as the means for a convenient and firm grasp of the vessel. But the structural form of the handle, notwithstanding the exuberance of fancy displayed in its decoration, is always subservient to its purpose, and nowhere do we find, through mere caprice or fancy, any departure from that common-sense principle, truth and fitness, which cannot be inculcated too strongly on our modern art of pottery.

The handle, originally not in use — for the earlier, more primitive vessels shew no trace of any — is not, in fact, an organic, integral part of the vessel, but rather an appendage, and its decorative treatment in perfect harmony with its characteristic nature. The ends of the handle, in order to mark the points of contact, and perhaps also to screen the otherwise rather unsatisfactory arrangement, are generally enriched by masks, honeysuckle or other decoration. Its being merely affixed to the body of the vase is more strikingly expressed with the horizontal, than with the vertical handle, the latter affording a better and more intimate connection with the brim of the vessel.

The necessity of carrying about vessels of large dimensions filled with liquids may have been the occasion for providing them with handles, and most likely only rope-ends and branches were first used for this purpose, before proceeding to make them of the same material as the vessel. This may be assumed from the ornamental structure of the handle, and is further corroborated by specimens of later date, different materials being used then for body and handle; while the other style of manufacturing them both of the same substance was, no doubt, derived from vessels of metal, a material particularly suggestive of such a process.

Not much later, by another step in advance, appears the marble vessel, the rendering of decorative features, mouldings, and main-outlines, displaying, as is the case in most ornamental marble-works, the influence of the metal prototype, on which they are obviously based.

Finally also the handle structure of earthen-vessels shows direct traces, or at least reminiscences of the metal style, noticeable in all but the later examples. Here the honeysuckle or mask in bold relief has to give way to its painted substitute, the transition between

handle and bowl of the vase being effected by continuous, rounded off lines, such as might result from modelling the soft clay with the fingers.

Beautiful specimens of handles from metal vessels are represented in Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6. The handle rising in gracefully curved lines, affording a convenient and firm hold, shows, in Fig. 1, deeply incised ornaments, in Fig. 2, hollow mouldings or channels of bold design.

Of very elegant and playful conception, the handle in Fig. 3 is represented by a nude little figure, peeping with curiosity into the fluid contents; in Fig. 4 suggestively adorned by a Chimera, jealously guarding the precious liquor. In juxtaposition to this, we give, in

Fig. 5, a specimen of the most perfect beauty and finish of form.

A good example of a horizontal handle, which, being affixed at both ends to the bulbed part of the vessel, demands a symmetrical arrangement, is illustrated in Fig. 6.

Figs. 7 & 8 show handles of earthen-vessels, Fig. 7 exhibiting still the characteristic features of their metal origin, while in Fig. 8, more attention is paid to the nature of the material.

Fig. 9 represents a marble handle, obviously suggested by metal specimens.

All from original drawings, Figs. 1—8 are from vessels in the Museo nazionale at Naples, Fig. 9 being in the Vatican collection at Rome.

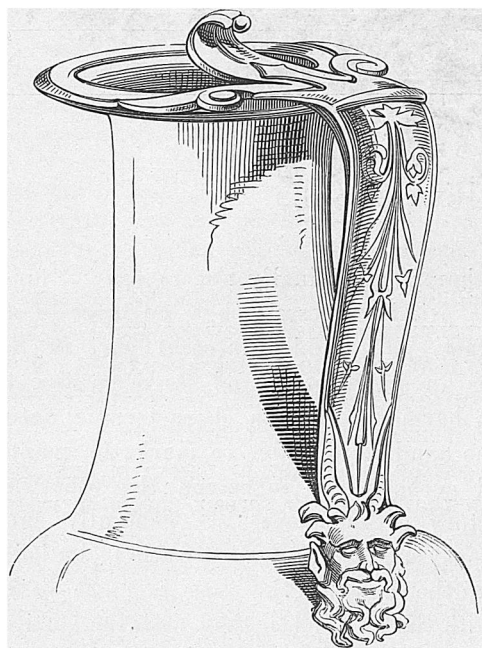


Fig. 1.

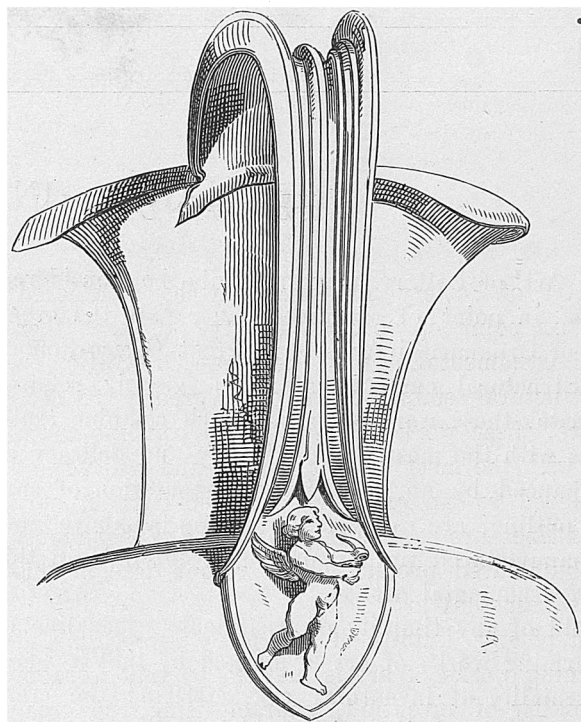


Fig. 2.

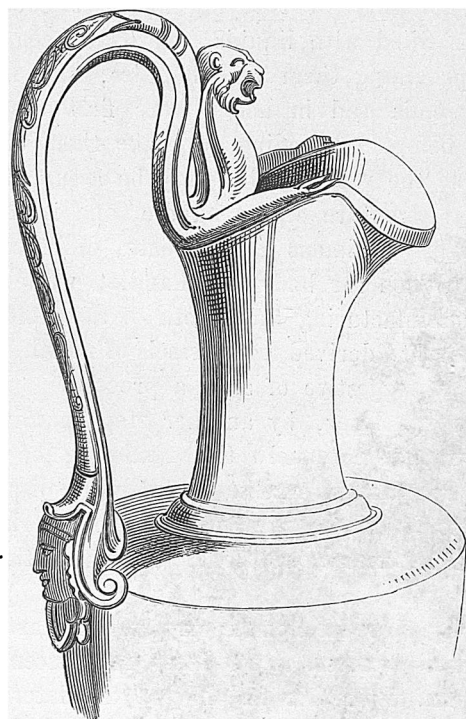


Fig. 4.

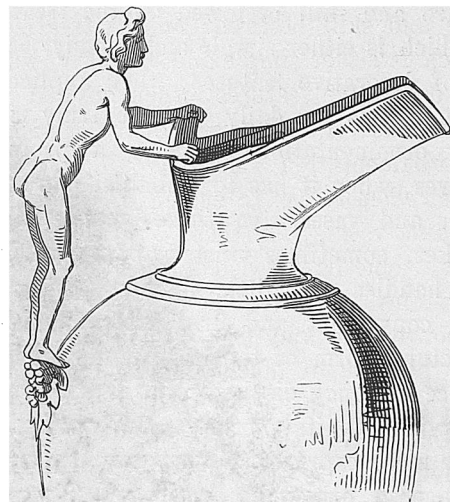


Fig. 3.

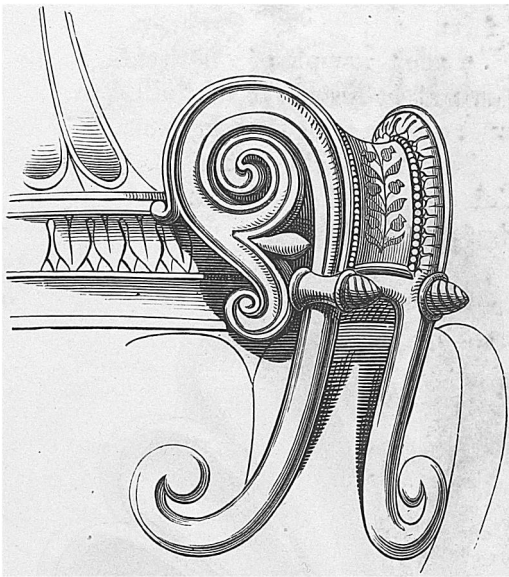


Fig. 5.

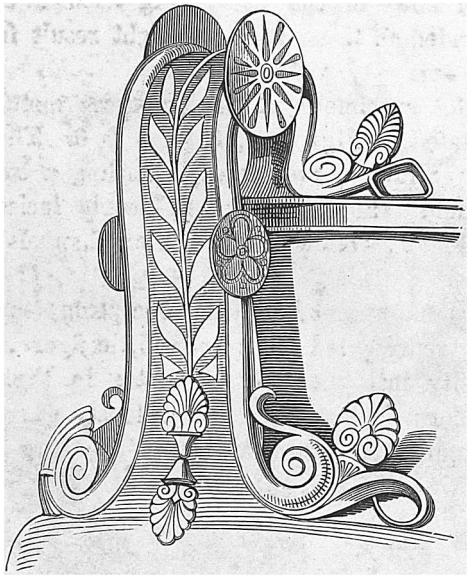


Fig. 7.

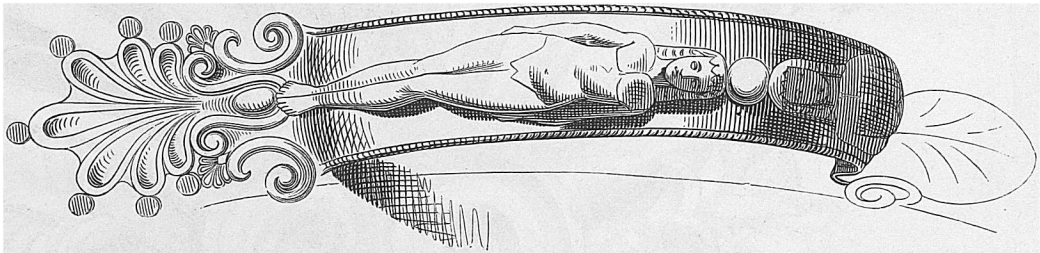


Fig. 6.

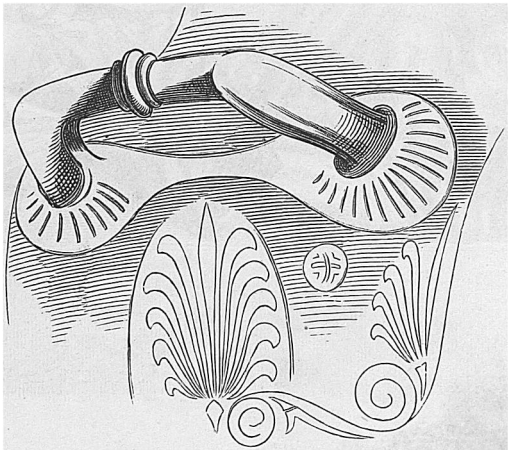


Fig. 8.

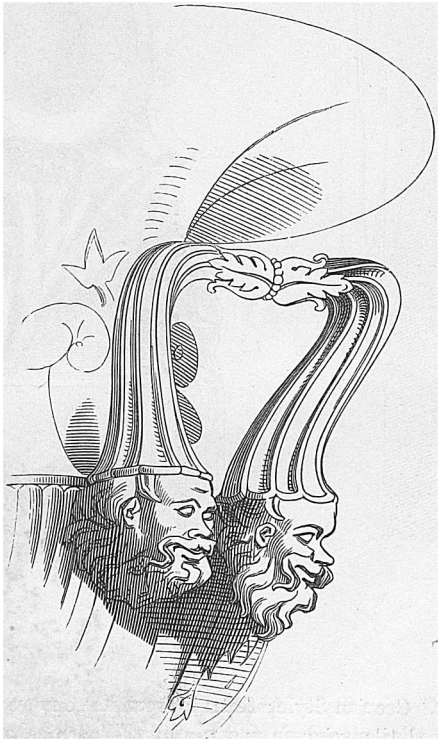


Fig. 9.